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 Foundations of Writing - Dr. Sherry
 02/22/2015

Religion in Public Colleges v. Religiously Affiliated Colleges

Problem

Many college students seem to avoid the subject of religion, whether it be at home or at college. I have a few friends who enjoy talking about religion and who actively participate in religious events here at Bloomsburg, but I also have friends who are uncomfortable with the subject. They consider religion to be less important than sports, video games, or gossip; basically it's less important than everything else. Sometimes they go so far as to mock or tease my friends who feel strongly about their religious involvement. Whatever your preference is, there is no avoiding that religious life is another part of the average college experience. Other "average" college experiences include the act of partaking in underage drinking and going out to parties on the weekends. Many students partake in these activity because they assume they are socially expected of them. I have wondered, then, if students in religiously affiliated colleges feel these same social pressures as those who attend public colleges. How does religion in public and religiously affiliated colleges effect the average college student's decision to relieve stress in this manner? In this paper, I will use three sources to show what other studies suggest about the differences between public colleges religiously affiliated colleges.

Background

Some academic journals claim that public universities should more publically include religion in their curriculum. According to Kessler (2013), "The removal of an overt theology curriculum at public universities, along with the suppression of purity and nation-oriented/group loyalty language among academics, has upset the relations mapped so carefully by Kant between university-based knowledge, public responsibility, and the State" (p. 25). This claim comes from the thought that a strict religious curriculum could foster good moral choices in young adults. In a study about how

college students cope with stress at religiously affiliated colleges, Dr. Stoltzfus and Dr. Farkas found that students at religiously affiliated colleges who are involved in religious organizations on campus, especially women students, are less likely to turn to alcohol use to deal with stress of the academic or romantic kind (Stoltzfus, Farkas, 2012, p.1134).¹ According to Stoltzfus and Farkas (2012) , “This finding suggests that as involvement in religious coping practices increases, women are less likely to engage in stress-motivated alcohol use” (p. 1139).² Studies like this suggest that students who join religious organizations on campus, whether they be public or religiously affiliated, are less likely to turn to means such as drinking or partying to cope with the stress of the average college life.³

Method

I decided that the best way to go about solving my problem was to interview five students who go to Bloomsburg University, and one student who attends the Franciscan University of Steubenville. In my process I made sure to interview three students that participated in religious organizations and religious events on campus and in the town of Bloomsburg. The other two students from Bloomsburg University do not participate in religious organizations or events, but often participate in other clubs with specific interests. The student from Steubenville University participates in a few religious organizations on her campus. I asked them individually how they felt about religion, and whether they thought it affects them and the people around them at college.

Findings

From my results, I have found that people are generally affected by religion, whether they are an active member of a religious organization on campus or not. Out of the six people I interviewed on campus, three of them are involved in religious groups or events. One of them individuals is very active in his religious organization, while the other two try to attend the weekly meetings that their organizations host if their workload for the week permits. These individuals feel very strongly about their religious affiliations, and even though two of them are in the honors program and therefore have

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a considerable larger work load because of mandatory honors classes and mandatory community service, none of them have felt like turning to alcohol to relieve their stress.

The other two individuals who I interviewed at Bloomsburg University are not active in religious organizations on campus, but they have a generally positive view of religion. They both admit to sometimes attending religious events, such as mass, with their family members when they are back home. They both have expressed a general interest in attending religious events on campus, but have admitted to generally not feeling compelled because of laziness or sometimes the amount of homework they may have. Neither of these college students have turned to alcohol to relieve the stress of their academic or personal lives, instead preferring to hangout with friends and do social activities with them. These activities include playing board games, playing video games, eating, or just talking.

The one person who attends Steubenville University admits that there are many religious organizations on campus, but that she does not participate in any of them. She admits that a heavy workload and general laziness have effected her decision to join a religious organization. She also told me that even though she feels that religious organizations have a strong presence on campus, she has not noticed many students around her who actively participate in theses organizations. This individual claims that she would rather turn to friends and relaxing alone, reading a book or watching tv, to relieve stress.

I also asked the students how they felt about community service.⁴ The student who attends Steubenville told me that she would sometimes participate in community service with a handful of clubs that she is involved in. Yet she does not often participate in community service events, especially if she feels that her workload for the week is excessive. The two students who are sometimes involved in religious activities told me that they like to volunteer in community events, and that they would often try to balance volunteering with their busy and hectic schedules. The one student who often participates in religious activities and events frequently participates in community

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service. He often participates with religious organizations on campus, and it is not uncommon for him to volunteer from two to three times a week. The two student who do not participate in religious organizations at Bloomsburg do not participate in community service. They feel that their workload and their commitments to other clubs takes precedence over volunteering in community events. According to Kozloski and Ferrari (2014), "...one's faith maturity in horizontal/community relations was highly related to intent to engage in social justice actions" (p. 430).⁵ My findings make me agree with Kozloski and Ferrari, in that the more religiously involved one is in their community, the more they feel like volunteering in their community.⁶

Conclusion

Through my research and testing, I have generally come to agree with the studies done on the topic of religion in colleges. It seems to me that the more religiously involved a person is in their community, the less likely they will be to relieve their academic or interpersonal stress through consumption of alcoholic beverages. Although I agree with this study with some caveats, because the two students who do not participate in religious activity did not drink alcohol to relieve stress. I believe that the question of whether religious organizations reduce an individual's need to reduce stress through consumption of alcohol comes down to an individual and their habits.

It also seems that the more involved one is in religious organizations, the more likely they are to participate in community service. There seems to be more of a push for community service when it comes to religious organizations, as opposed to other organizations with specific interests.

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